

Letter from Voltaire¹ to Rousseau



August 30, 1755²

From Les Delices near Geneva³

I have received, Sir, your new book against the human race; I thank you for it. You will please men to whom you tell their own truths, and you will not correct them. You paint with very true colors the horrors of human society from which ignorance and weakness anticipate so many comforts. Never has so much intelligence been used in seeking to make us stupid.⁴

One acquires the desire to walk on all fours when one reads your work. Nevertheless, since I lost this habit more than sixty years ago, I unfortunately feel that it is impossible for me to take it up again. And I leave that natural gait to those who are more worthy of it than you and I. I also cannot embark to go to find the savages of Canada, first because the illnesses to which I am condemned make a doctor from Europe necessary to me, second because the war has been carried into that country, and the examples of our nations have made the savages almost as wicked as we are. I limit myself to being a peaceful savage in the solitude that I have chosen near your fatherland where you ought to be.

I admit with you that literature and the sciences have sometimes caused much harm.

The enemies of Tasso⁵ made his life a web of misfortunes, those of Galileo made him moan in prisons at seventy years of age for having known the motion of the earth, and what is still more shameful is that they obliged him to retract.

As soon as our⁶ friends began the encyclopedic Dictionary,⁷ those who dared to be their rivals called them deists, atheists, and even Jansenists.⁸ If I dared to count myself among those whose labors have had only persecution as recompense, I would make you see a troop of wretches desperate to ruin me from the day I presented the tragedy of Oedipus⁹, a library full of ridiculous calumnies printed against me, an ex-Jesuit priest whom I had saved from the death penalty¹⁰ repaying me with defamatory libels for the service I had rendered him; an even guiltier man having my own work, *The Age of Louis XIV* printed with notes in which

the crassest ignorance reeled off the most brazen impostures, another who sells to a book-seller a so-called universal history under my name, and the book-seller greedy enough, and foolish enough, to print this shapeless fabric of blunders, false dates, facts, and mangled names; and finally men craven enough and wicked enough to impute this rhapsody to me.¹¹ I would make you see society infected with this new sort of men unknown to all antiquity who, not being able to embrace a decent profession either as a lackey or laborer and unfortunately knowing how to read and write, make themselves literary brokers, steal manuscripts, disfigure them, and sell them. I could complain that a pleasantry written more than thirty years ago on the same subject that Chapelain had the stupidity to treat seriously,¹² today circulates the world because of the unfaithfulness and infamous avarice of those wretches who have disfigured it with as much foolishness as malice, and who, after thirty years, everywhere sell this work which is certainly no longer mine and which has become theirs.¹³ I would add lastly that they dared to rummage through the most respectable archives and to steal from them a portion of the memoirs that I had put there as a deposit when I was historiographer of France, and they sold to a book-seller in Paris the fruit of my labors.¹⁴ I would depict for you ingratitude, imposture, and rapine pursuing me to the foot of the Alps and to the edge of my tomb.

But, Sir, admit also that these thorns attached to literature and reputation are only flowers in comparison to the other ills which have inundated the earth at all times. Admit that neither Cicero, nor Lucretius, nor Virgil, nor Horace were the authors of the proscriptions of Marius, of Sylla, of that debauched Antony, of that imbecile Lepidus, of that tyrant without courage Octavius Caepias so cravenly surnamed Augustus.¹⁵

Admit that the banter of Marot did not produce the Saint Bartholemew's Day Massacre,¹⁶ and the tragedy of the *Cid* did not cause the wars of the Fronde.¹⁷ Great crimes have been committed only by famous ignoramuses. What makes and what will always make this world a vale of tears is the insatiable cupidity and indomitable pride of men, from Thamas Couli Can¹⁸ who did not know how to read to a customs clerk who knows only how to calculate. Letters nourish the soul, set it right, console it; and they even make your glory when you write against them. You are like Achilles who gets carried away against glory, and like Father Malebranche whose brilliant imagination wrote against the imagination.¹⁹

Monsieur Chapui²⁰ informs me that your health is very bad. You must

come to restore it in your native air, enjoy freedom, drink the milk of our cows with me, and graze on our grass. I am very philosophically and with the most tender esteem, Sir,

Your very humble and very obedient servant.

VOLTAIRE

Letter from Rousseau to Voltaire



Paris, September 10, 1755

It is I who must thank you, Sir, in all respects. In offering you the outline of my sad reveries, I did not believe I was giving you a present worthy of you, but that I was fulfilling a duty and paying you an homage we all owe you as our leader. Sensitive, in addition, of the honor you confer on my fatherland, I share the gratitude of my Fellow Citizens, and hope it will only increase when they have profited from the teachings you can give them. Embellish the sanctuary you have chosen. Enlighten a People worthy of your lessons. And you who know how to portray virtues and freedom so well, teach us to cherish them within our walls as we do in your Writings. All that comes near you ought to learn from you the path to glory.¹

You see that I do not aspire to reestablish us in our stupidity,² although for myself I greatly regret the little bit of mine that I have lost. With respect to you, Sir, such a return would be a miracle both so great and so harmful that only God could do it and only the Devil could wish it. So do not try to go back to walking on all fours. No one in the world would succeed less than you at it. You stand us all up too well on our own two feet to stop standing up on yours.

I agree about all the disfavor that pursues men famous in letters. I even agree about all the ills linked to Humanity, which seem independent of our vain knowledge. Men have brought upon themselves so many sources of wretchedness that when chance removes one, they are scarcely less beset. Besides, there are hidden connections in the progress of things which the common person doesn't perceive, but which will not escape the wise man's eye if he would think about it. It isn't Terence, or Cicero, or Virgil, or Seneca, or Tacitus; it isn't either learned men or Poets who produced the misfortunes of Rome and the crimes of the Romans. But without the slow and secret poison that little by little corrupted the most vigorous government that history has ever recorded, neither Cicero nor Lucretius nor Sallust would have existed or written. The lovable century of Lelius and Terence led from afar to the brilliant century of Augustus and Horace, and eventually to the horrible centuries of Seneca and Nero, Domitian and Martial. The taste for Letters and the Arts in a People is

born from an internal vice which it enlarges. And if it is true that all human progress is pernicious for the species, the progress of the mind and of knowledge that enlarges our pride and multiplies our errors soon hastens our misfortunes. But a time comes when the evil is such that the very causes that gave birth to it are necessary to prevent it from becoming larger. It is the sword that must be left in the wound for fear that the wounded person will die when it is removed. For myself, if I had pursued my first vocation and had neither read nor written, I would doubtless have been happier. However, if letters were abolished now, I would be deprived of the only pleasure remaining to me. It is in their bosom that I console myself for all my ills. It is among those who cultivate them that I taste the sweetness of friendship and learn to enjoy life without fearing death. I owe them the little that I am. I owe them even the honor of being known by you. But let us consult interest in our business affairs and truth in our writings. Although Philosophers, Historians, and Learned men are needed to enlighten the World and lead its blind inhabitants, if wise Memnon told me the truth, I know nothing so crazy as a People of wise men.³

Let us agree, Sir: if it is good that great Geniuses teach men, it is necessary that the common people receive their teachings. If everyone gets involved in giving them, who will want to receive them? Montaigne says that the lame are ill-suited to bodily exercise, and those with lame souls to mental exercise.⁴

But in this learned century, we see only the lame wishing to teach others to walk. The people receive the Writings of the wise in order to judge them and not to learn. Never have there been so many Dandins.⁵ The Theater crawls with them, the cafes echo with their pronouncements. They air them in newspapers, the Quais are covered with their Writings, and I hear the Orphan* criticized, because it is applauded, by a scribbler so incapable of seeing its faults that he can scarcely feel its beauties.

Let us seek the first source of society's disorders, and we will find that all of men's ills come far more from error than ignorance, and that what we do not know at all harms us far less than what we believe we know. Now what method is more certain to rush from mistake to mistake than the frenzy to know everything? If people had not claimed to know that the earth does not turn, Galileo would not have been punished for saying that it did. If only Philosophers had claimed that title, the Encyclopedia would not have had any persecutors. If a hundred Myrmidons did not

* A tragedy by Voltaire that was playing at that time.

aspire to glory, you would enjoy yours in peace, or at least you would have only rivals worthy of you.

Therefore, do not be surprised to feel some thorns inseparable from the flowers that crown great talents. The insults of your enemies are the satirical acclaim that follows the cortege of the Triumphant. It is the public's eagerness for all your Writings that produces the thefts of which you complain. But adulterations are not easy, for neither iron nor lead is easily mixed with gold. Allow me to say this because of my interest in your peace and our education. Scorn vain rumors whose intention is less to harm you than to distract you from doing good. The more you are criticized, the more you should make yourself admired. A good book is a devastating reply to printed insults. And who will dare attribute to you Writings you did not write as long as you are writing only inimitable ones?

I am grateful for your invitation. And if this winter leaves me well enough to go and live in my Fatherland in the spring, I will profit from your kindnesses. But I would prefer to drink water from your fountain than milk from your cows, and as for the grasses in your pasture, I fear that I shall find none other than the Lotus, which is not the fodder of Beasts, and the Moly, which prevents men from becoming beasts.⁶

I am with all my heart and with respect, etc.

Letter from J. J. Rousseau to Mr. de Voltaire



August 18, 1756

Your last Poems, Sir, have reached me in my solitude¹; and although all my friends know the love I have for your writings, I do not know from which side these could have come to me, unless it be from your own. I found pleasure in them along with instruction, and have recognized the hand of the master; and I believe I owe you thanks for the copy as well as for the work. I shall not tell you that everything in them appears equally good to me; but things in them that displease me only impose more confidence on me for those which carry me away. It is not without difficulty that I sometimes defend my reason against the charms of your Poetry; but in order to render my admiration more worthy of your works I force myself not to admire everything in them.

I shall do more, sir; I shall tell you without evasion, not the beauties that I believed I felt in these two poems, the task would unnerve my laziness, nor even the defects that will be noticed in them by abler people than I, but the displeasures which disturb the taste that I take to your lessons in this instance; and I shall tell them to you still softened by a first reading in which my heart listened avidly to yours, loving you as my brother, honoring you as my Master, flattering myself at last that you will recognize in my intentions the frankness of an upright soul, and in my speech the tone of a friend of the truth who speaks to a Philosopher. Besides, the more your second poem enchants me, the more freely I side against the first; for if you have not been afraid to oppose yourself, why should I be afraid to be of your opinion? I ought to believe that you are little beholden to sentiments that you refute so well.

All my grievances are then against your poem on the disaster of Lisbon, because I expected from it some results more worthy of the humanity which appears to have inspired you to write it. You reproach Pope and Leibniz for condemning our misfortunes, in maintaining that everything² is good³, and you so amplify the picture of our miseries that you aggravate the feeling of them: instead of the consolations for which I hoped, you only cause me to be afflicted. One might say that you fear that I do not see well enough how unfortunate I am; and it seems you expect to placate me a good deal by proving to me that everything is bad.

Do not deceive yourself on this, Sir; it happens entirely to the contrary of what you maintain. This optimism that you find so cruel, nevertheless consoles me in the very miseries that you depict to me as intolerable.

Pope's poem sweetens my troubles and leads me to patience; yours embitters my pains, invites me to grumbling, and depriving me of everything beyond a troubled hope, it reduces me to despair. In this strange tension which reigns between what you establish and what I experience, calm the perplexity which agitates me, and tell me, which is abused, feeling or reason? "Man, have patience," Pope and Leibniz tell me. "Your ills are a necessary consequence of your nature, and of the constitution of this universe. The eternal and beneficent Being who governs you would have liked to safeguard you from them. Of all the economies possible, he has chosen the one which combined the least bad with the most good, or (to say the same thing more bluntly, if it is necessary) if he has not done better, it is that he could not do better."

What does your poem now tell me? "Suffer forever, wretches. If there is a God who has created you, no doubt he is omnipotent; he could have prevented all your ills: do not hope then that they will ever end; for one would not know how to see why you exist, if it is not to suffer and die."⁴ I do not know what such a doctrine could possess that is more consoling than optimism and even fatalism. As for me, I acknowledge it appears to me even crueler than Manichaeism. If perplexity concerning the origin of evil forces you to alter one of the perfections of God, why do you wish to justify his power at the expense of his goodness? If it is necessary to choose between two errors, I like the first one even better.

You do not wish, Sir, that your work be regarded as a poem against Providence; and I shall indeed restrain myself from giving it this name, although you have characterized as a book against the human race a writing wherein I pleaded the cause of the human race against itself.⁵ I know the distinction that must be made between an author's intentions, and the consequences that can be drawn from his doctrine. The just defense of myself obliges me only to have you observe, that in depicting human miseries, my purpose was excusable, and even praiseworthy, as I believe, for I showed men how they caused their miseries themselves, and consequently how they might avoid them.

I do not see that one can seek the source of moral evil other than in man free, perfected, thereby corrupted; and as for physical ills, if sensitive and impassive matter is a contradiction, as it seems to me, they are inevitable in any system of which man is a part; and then the question is not at all why is man not perfectly happy, but why does he exist? Moreover I believe I have shown that with the exception of death, which is an evil

almost solely because of the preparations which one makes preceding it, most of our physical ills are still our own work.⁶ Without departing from your subject of Lisbon, admit, for example, that nature did not construct twenty thousand houses of six to seven stories there, and that if the inhabitants of this great city had been more equally spread out and more lightly lodged, the damage would have been much less, and perhaps of no account. All of them would have fled at the first disturbance, and the next day they would have been seen twenty leagues from there, as gay as if nothing had happened; but it is necessary to remain, to be obstinate about some hovels, to expose oneself to new quakes, because what is left behind is worth more than what can be brought along. How many unfortunate people have perished in this disaster because of one wanting to take his clothes, another his papers, another his money? Is it not known that the person of each man has become the least part of himself, and that it is almost not worth the trouble of saving it when one has lost all the rest?

You would have wished (and who would not have wished the same) that the quake had occurred in the middle of a wilderness rather than in Lisbon. Can one doubt that such also do take place in the wildernesses? But we do not speak of them, because they do not cause any harm to the Gentlemen of the Cities, the only men of whom we take account; they even cause little harm to the animals and Savages who dwell scattered in isolated places, and who fear neither the fall of housetops, nor the conflagration of houses. But what does such a privilege signify? Should it be said then that the order of the world ought to change according to our whims, that nature ought to be subjugated to our laws, and that in order to interdict an earthquake in some place, we have only to build a City there?

There are some events which often strike us more or less according to the perspective under which one considers them, and which lose much of the horror that they inspire at first glance, when one wants to examine them more closely. I have learned in *Zadig*, and nature confirms for me daily, that an early death is not always a real evil, and that it can sometimes pass for a relative good.⁷ Of so many men crushed under the ruins of Lisbon, several, undoubtedly, have evaded some greater misfortunes; and, despite everything touching in such a description, and however much it furnishes to poetry, it is not certain, that a single one of these unfortunates has suffered more than if, in accordance with the ordinary course of things, he had awaited in drawn out anguish the death which overtook him by surprise. Is there a sadder end than that of a dying man burdened with useless cares, whose solicitor and heirs do not permit him

to breathe, whose Physicians leisurely assassinate him in his bed, and whose barbarous Priests artfully cause to savor death?⁸ As for me, I see everywhere that the ills to which nature subjects us are far less cruel than those we add to them.

But, however ingenious we may be in stirring up our misfortunes by dint of fine institutions, we have not been able, up to the present, to perfect ourselves to the point of generally rendering life a burden to ourselves and to prefer nothingness to our existence; without which preference, discouragement, and despair would soon take hold of the greatest number, and the human race could not long subsist. But if it is better for us to be than not to be, this would be enough to justify our existence, even though we would have no compensation to expect for the ills that we have to suffer, and though these ills were as great as you depict them. But on this subject it is difficult to find any good faith among men, and any good calculations among Philosophers; because the latter in comparing what is good and bad always forget the sweet feeling of existence, independent of any other sensation, and because the vanity of despising death moves others to calumny life; almost like these women who, with a stained dress and some scissors claim to prefer holes to stains.

You think along with Erasmus that few people would want to be reborn in the same conditions in which they have lived;⁹ but such a one estimates his merchandise quite highly who greatly reduces it, if he has thereby some hope of concluding the sale. Besides, Sir, whom should I believe that you have consulted on that. Some rich people, perhaps, sated by false pleasures, but ignorant of genuine ones, always bored with life and always trembling over losing it; perhaps some literary people, of all the orders of men the most sedentary, the most unhealthy, the most reflective, and consequently the most unhappy. Do you want to find some men of better composition, or at least commonly more sincere, and who, forming the greatest number, at least because of that ought to be heard by preference? Consult an honest *bourgeois* who will have spent an obscure and tranquil life without projects and without ambition; a good artisan, who lives commodiously by his trade; even a peasant, not from France, where it is claimed that it is necessary to cause them to die of misery, in order for them to enable us to live, but of the country, for example, where you are, and generally of any free country.¹⁰ In fact I dare to state that perhaps there is in the upper Valais not a single Mountaineer discontented with his almost automatic life, and who would not willingly accept, even in place of Paradise, the bargain of being reborn unceasingly in order to vegetate thus in perpetuity. These differences cause me to believe that it is often the abuse we make of life which renders it a burden

to us; and I have a far less favorable opinion of those who are vexed at having lived than of those who can say with Cato: *Nec me vixisse poenitet, quoniam ita vixi, ut frustra me natum non existimem*.¹¹ This does not mean that the Wise man might not depart voluntarily without a murmur and without despair, when nature or fortune very clearly brings him the order for departure. But, according to the ordinary course of things, of whatever ills might be spread over human life, it is all things considered not a bad present; and if it is not always bad to die, it is quite rarely so to live.

Our different manners of thinking on all these matters teach me why several of your proofs are so little conclusive for me. For I am not unaware how much more readily human reason grasps the mold of our opinions than that of the truth, and that between two men of contrary opinion, what the one believes demonstrated is often only a sophism for the other. When you attack, for example, the chain of beings so well described by Pope, you say that it is not true that, if one removed an atom from the world, the world could not subsist.¹² You cite thereon Mr. de Crouzas; then you add that nature is not subject to any precise measure nor to any precise form; that no planet is moved in an absolutely regular orbit; that no known being is of a precisely mathematical form; that no precise quantity is required for any operation; that nature never acts strictly; that therefore one has no reason to assert that one atom less on Earth would be the cause of the Earth's destruction. I admit to you that concerning all this, Sir, I am more struck by the force of your assertion than by that of your reasoning, and that on this occasion, I would surrender more confidently to your authority than to your proofs.

With respect to Mr. de Crouzas, I have not read his writing against Pope, and perhaps I am in no position to understand it; but what is very certain is that I shall not grant to him what I shall have disputed with you, and that I have quite as little faith in his proofs as in his authority. Far from thinking that nature is not subject to the precision of quantities and of forms, I believe quite to the contrary that she alone strictly follows this precision, because she alone knows how to compare exactly the ends and the means, and to measure the force of the resistance. As for these pretended irregularities, can it be doubted that they all have their physical cause, and does it suffice not to perceive it in order to deny that it exists? These apparent irregularities undoubtedly come from some laws unknown to us and that nature follows quite as faithfully as those which are known to us; by some agent that we do not perceive, and of which the obstacle or the cooperation has fixed measures in all its operations: otherwise it would be necessary to say flatly that there are some actions

without a principle and some effects without a cause; which is repugnant to all philosophy.

Let us assume two weights in equilibrium, and nevertheless unequal; to the smallest let the quantity be added which is the difference between them: either the two weights will still remain in equilibrium, and we shall have a cause without effect; or the equilibrium will be broken, and we shall have an effect without cause. But if the weights were of iron, and there were a particle of magnet hidden under one of the two, the precision of nature would then remove from it the appearance of precision, and by virtue of exactitude it would seem to lack it. There is not a form, not an operation, not a law in the physical world to which one could not apply some example similar to the one which I just proposed for weight.

You say that no known being is of a precisely mathematical form; I ask you, Sir, if there is some form possible which is not, and if the most bizarre orbit is not as regular in the eyes of nature as a perfect circle is to ours. As for the rest I imagine that, if some body could have this apparent regularity, it would only be the universe itself, supposing it full and limited; for mathematical forms, being only abstractions, only have relations to themselves; whereas all those of natural bodies are relative to other bodies, and to any movements which modify them: therefore that would still not prove anything against the precision of nature, even if we were in agreement over what you understand by this word *precision*.

You distinguish events that have effects from those which have none. I doubt that this distinction is sound. Every event seems to me necessarily to have some effect, whether moral or physical, or composed of the two, but which are not always perceived, because the connection of events is even more difficult to follow than that of men; as in general one ought not to look for effects more considerable than the events which produce them, the smallness of causes often renders the examination ridiculous; even though the effects might be certain, and also several almost imperceptible effects often unite to produce a considerable event. Add that such an effect does not fail to occur, although it acts outside of the body which produces it. Thus, the dust that a carriage raises can do nothing for the operation of the vehicle and influence that of the world; but as there is nothing foreign to the universe, everything which happens there, acts necessarily on the universe itself.¹³ Therefore, Sir, your examples appear to me more ingenious than convincing; I see a thousand plausible reasons why it would perhaps not be indifferent to Europe that a certain day the heiress of Burgundy might be well or badly coiffured; nor to the destiny of Rome, that Caesar might have turned his eyes to the right or to the left, and spat from one or the other side, while going

to the Senate the day he was punished there.¹⁴ In a word, in reminding me of the grain of sand cited by Pascal, I am in several respects of the opinion of your Brahman¹⁵; and in whatever manner one envisages things, if all events do not have tangible effects, it seems to me incontestable that all have some real ones, of which the human mind easily loses the thread, but which are never confused by nature.

You say it is demonstrated that the celestial bodies make their revolution in non-resistant space.¹⁶ It was surely a beautiful thing to demonstrate; but according to the custom of the ignorant, I have very little faith in demonstrations which surpass my grasp. I would imagine that in order to build up this one, one must just about have reasoned in this manner:

A certain force acting according to a certain law ought to give to the Stars a certain motion in a non-resistant environment; but the Stars have exactly calculated motion; therefore there is no resistance. But who can know if there are not perhaps a million other possible laws, without counting the genuine one, according to which the same motions would be explained still better in a fluid than in a vacuum by this one?¹⁷ Has not the abhorrence of a vacuum for a long time explained most of the effects that have since been attributed to the action of air? Other experiments having since destroyed the abhorrence of the vacuum is not everything found filled? Has the vacuum not been reestablished on new calculations? Who will reply to us that a still more exact system will not destroy it over again? Let us leave aside the innumerable difficulties that a Physicist would perhaps encounter on the nature of light and of illuminated spaces; but do you in good faith believe that Bayle, whose wisdom and caution in matters of opinion I, like you, admire, would have found your own opinion so demonstrated?¹⁸ In general it seems that the Skeptics forget themselves a little as soon as they take up the dogmatic tone, and that they ought to use the term *to demonstrate* more soberly than anyone. What are not the means of being believed, when one plumes oneself for knowing nothing, while affirming so many things?

As for the rest, you have made a very fitting correction in Pope's system, by observing that there is no proportional gradation between the creatures and the Creator, and that, if the chain of created beings leads to God, it is because he holds it, and not because he terminates it.¹⁹

On the good of the whole, preferable to that of its parts, you have man say: "I ought to be as dear to my master, I, a thinking and feeling being, as the planets which probably do not feel at all."²⁰ Undoubtedly this material universe ought not to be dearer to its Author than a single thinking and feeling being. But the system of this universe which produces, conserves, and perpetuates all the thinking and feeling beings

ought to be dearer to him than a single one of these beings; he can therefore, despite all his goodness, or rather through his very goodness, sacrifice something of the happiness of individuals to the conservation of the whole. I believe, I hope, I am worth more in the eyes of God than the land of a planet; but if the planets are inhabited, as is probable, why would I be worth more in his eyes than all the inhabitants of Saturn? These ideas have been nicely turned to ridicule. It is certain that all the analogies favor this population, and that it is only human pride that might be opposed. But this population being assumed, the conservation of the universe seems to have, for God himself, a morality which multiplies itself by the number of inhabited worlds.

That the corpse of a man nourishes some worms, some wolves, or some plants is not, I admit, a compensation for the death of this man;²¹ but if, in the system of the universe, it is necessary for the conservation of the human race that there be a circulation of substance among men, animals' and vegetables, then the particular ill of an individual contributes to the general good. I die, I am eaten by worms; but my children, my brothers will live as I have lived, and I do, by the order of nature, for all men, what Codrus, Curtius, the Decii, the Philaeni, and a thousand others did voluntarily for a small part of men.²²

To return, Sir, to the system that you attack, I believe that one cannot examine it suitably without distinguishing carefully particular evil, whose existence no Philosopher has ever denied, from the general evil that the optimist denies. It is not a question of knowing whether each one of us suffers or not; but whether it be good that the universe exists, and whether our ills be inevitable in the constitution of the universe. Thus the addition of an article would render, it seems, the proposition more exact; and in place of *Everything is good*,²³ it would be more worthwhile to say: *The whole is good*, or *Everything is good for the whole*. Then it is quite evident that no man would know how to give direct proof either for or against; for these proofs depend on a perfect knowledge of the constitution of the world and of the purpose of its Author, and this knowledge is incontestably above human intelligence. The true principles of optimism can be drawn neither from the properties of matter, nor from the mechanics of the universe, but only by inference from the perfections of God who presides over everything;²⁴ so that one does not prove the existence of God by the system of Pope, but the system of Pope by the existence of God, and it is incontrovertible that from the question of Providence is derived that of the origin of evil. But if these two questions have not been better treated, the one before the other, it is because one has always reasoned so badly on Providence that the absurd things

that have been spoken about it have gravely confused all the corollaries that could be drawn from this great and consoling dogma.

The first who spoiled the cause of God are the Priests and the Devout, who do not allow that anything occurs according to the established order, but always have Divine justice intervene in purely natural events, and in order to be sure of their occurrence, punish and chastise the wicked, put to the proof or requite the good indiscriminately with some benefits or misfortunes, according to the event. For myself, I do not know whether it is a good Theology; but I find it a bad manner of reasoning, to base the proofs of Providence indiscriminately on the *pros* and *cons*, and to attribute to it unselectively everything which would equally occur without it.

The Philosophers, in their turn, hardly seem to me to be more reasonable, when I see them blame Heaven that they are not insensitive, cry that all is lost when they have a tooth ache, or when they are poor, or when they have been robbed, and charge God, as Seneca says, to watch over their valise.²⁵ If some tragic accident had caused Cartouche or Caesar to perish in their infancy one would have said: What crimes have they committed? These two brigands lived, and we say: Why were they permitted to live?²⁶ In contrast the devout person will say in the first instance: God wanted to punish the father by taking his son from him; and in the second: God preserved the child for the chastisement of the people. Thus, whatever part nature might have taken, Providence is always right among the Devout and always wrong among the Philosophers. Perhaps in the order of things human it is neither wrong nor right, because everything keeps to the shared law, and because there is no exception for anyone. It is to be believed that particular events are nothing here below in the eyes of the Master of the universe, that his Providence is only universal, that he is content to preserve the genera and the species, and to preside over the whole without being disturbed by the manner in which each individual spends this brief life.²⁷ Does a wise King who desires that everyone live happily in his States have to inform himself whether the taverns are good there? The passer-by grumbles one night when they are bad, and laughs the rest of his days at an impatience misplaced this way. *Commorandi enim Natura diversorium nobis non habitandi dedit.*²⁸

To think rightly in this respect, it seems that things ought to be considered relatively in the physical order, and absolutely in the moral order: with the result that the greatest idea that I can give myself of Providence is that each material being be disposed the best way possible in relation to the whole, and each intelligent and sensitive being the best way possible in relation to himself; which signifies in other terms that for whom-

ever feels his existence, it is worth more to exist than not to exist.²⁹ But it is necessary to apply this rule to the total duration of each sensitive being, and not to several particular instances of its duration, such as human life;³⁰ which shows how much the question of Providence depends on that of the immortality of the soul in which I have the good fortune to believe, without being unaware that reason can doubt it, and on that of the eternity of punishments which neither you nor I, nor ever a man thinking well of God, will ever believe.³¹

If I restore these different questions to their common principle, it seems to me that they are all related to that of the existence of God. If God exists, he is perfect; if he is perfect, he is wise, powerful, and just; if he is wise and powerful, all is good; if he is just and powerful, my soul is immortal; if my soul is immortal, thirty years of life are nothing for me, and are perhaps necessary for the maintenance of the universe. If one grants me the first proposition, never will one shake those following; if one denies it, it is not necessary to dispute over its consequences.

Neither of us is in this last case. So far at least am I from being able to presume anything similar on your part in reading the collection of your works, the greater part offer me the greatest, most gentle, most consoling ideas of the Divinity, and I much prefer a Christian after your fashion than after that of the Sorbonne.³²

As for me, I naively admit to you that neither the pro nor the con seems to me demonstrated on this point by the lights of reason, and that if the Theist bases his sentiments only on probabilities, the Atheist, even less precise, seems to me only to base his own on some contrary possibilities. Moreover, the objections, on both sides, are always insoluble because they take in some things of which men have no genuine idea at all.³³ I agree to all that, and yet I believe in God quite as strongly as I believe in any other truth, because to believe and not to believe are the things which depend least on me, because the state of doubt is a state too violent for my soul, because when my reason wavers, my faith cannot for long remain in suspense, and is determined without it, that at least a thousand subjects of preference entice me from the most consoling side and join the weight of hope to the equilibrium of reason.

[I remember that what has struck me the most forcefully in my whole life, on the fortuitous arrangement of the universe, is the twenty-first philosophical thought, where is shown by the laws of analysis of chance that when the quantity of the throws is infinite, the difficulty of the event is more than sufficiently compensated by the multiplicity of the throws, and that consequently the mind ought to be more astonished by the hypothetical continuation of chaos than by the real birth of the uni-

verse.³⁴ This is, while assuming motion necessary, what has never been said with more force to my mind on this dispute; and, as for me, I declare that I do not know the least response that common sense might have, whether true or false, if not to deny as false what one cannot know, that motion might be essential to matter. From another perspective, I do not know whether the generation of organic bodies and the perpetuity of seeds have ever been explained by materialism; but there is this difference between these two opposed positions, that, while both the one and the other seem equally convincing to me, the last alone persuades me.³⁵ As for the first, let someone come to tell me that, from a fortuitous throw of letters the *Henriade* was composed, I would deny it without hesitating; it is more possible for chance to bring it about than for my mind to believe it, and I feel that there is a point where moral impossibilities are for me equivalent to a physical certainty. One will have to speak finely to me about the eternity of time; I have not traversed it; about the infinity of the throws; I have not counted them; and my incredulity, quite as little philosophical as one will like, will triumph thereon over the very demonstration itself.³⁶ I do not deny that what I call on that matter a *proof of sentiment* might be called *prejudice*; and I do not give this obstinacy of belief as a model; but with a good faith perhaps without example, I give it as an invincible disposition of my soul, that nothing will ever be able to surmount, which up to now I have never regretted, and which one can never attack without cruelty.]³⁷

This, then, is a truth from which we both depart, in support of which you feel how easy optimism is to defend and Providence to justify, and to you it is not necessary to repeat the trite but solid reasons which have been provided so often on this subject.³⁸ With regard to the Philosophers, who do not acknowledge the principle, it is unnecessary to dispute with them on these matters, because what is only a proof of sentiment for us cannot become a demonstration for them, and because it is not a reasonable speech to say to a man: You ought to believe this, because I believe it. They, on their part, ought not to dispute with us on these same matters, because these are only corollaries of the principal proposition that a decent adversary hardly dares oppose to them, and that in their turn they would be very wrong to require that the corollary be proven to them independently of the proposition which serves as its base. I think they ought not, for still another reason. It is that there is inhumanity in troubling peaceful souls, and in afflicting men to no purpose, when what one wishes to teach them is neither certain nor useful. I think, in a word, that by your example, the superstition which troubles society

cannot be attacked too strongly nor the Religion that sustains it too much respected.³⁹

But, like you, I am indignant that the faith of everyone is not in the most perfect liberty, and that man dares control the interior of consciences where he is unable to penetrate; as if it depended on us to believe or not to believe in matters where demonstration has no place, and that reason could ever be subjected to authority. Have the Kings of this world therefore any superintendency in the other? And have they any right to torment their Subjects here below in order to force them to go to Paradise? No; all human Government is limited by its nature to civil duties; and whatever the Sophist Hobbes might have been able to say on this, when a man serves the State well, he does not owe an account to anyone of the manner in which he serves God.⁴⁰

I do not know if this just Being will not one day punish every tyranny exercised in his name; I am quite sure, at least, that he will not participate in it, and will not refuse eternal happiness to any virtuous unbeliever of good faith. Can I, without offending his goodness and even his justice doubt that an upright heart redeems an involuntary error, and that irreproachable morals are well worth a thousand bizarre creeds prescribed by men, and rejected by reason? I shall say more; if I could, at my choice, buy good works at the price of my faith, and compensate by dint of virtue my supposed incredulity, I would not hesitate an instant, and I would rather be able to say to God: I have done, without thinking of thee, the good which is pleasing to thee, and my heart followed thy will without knowing it; than to say to him, as I must do one day: Alas! I loved thee and have not ceased to offend thee; I have known thee, and have done nothing to please thee.

There is, I admit, a sort of profession of faith that the laws can impose; but beyond the principles of morality and natural right, it ought to be purely negative, because there can exist Religions which attack the foundation of society, and because it is necessary to begin by exterminating these Religions in order to assure the peace of the State.⁴¹ Of these dogmas to proscribe, intolerance is easily the most odious; but it is necessary to catch it at its source; for the most sanguinary Fanatics change their language according to their fortune, and preach only patience and gentleness when they are not the strongest. Therefore I call intolerant by principles any man who imagines that one cannot be a good man without believing everything that he believes, and damns unmercifully all those who do not think like him. Indeed, the faithful are rarely of a disposition to leave reprobates in peace in this world; and a Saint who

thinks he lives among the damned willingly takes up in advance the business of the devil. Yet if there were some intolerant unbelievers who wished to force the people to believe nothing, I would proscribe them no less severely than those who wish to force belief in everything which pleases them.

I would therefore wish that in each State one might have a moral code, or a sort of civil profession of faith, which contained positively the social maxims that everyone would be bound to admit, and negatively the fanatical maxims that one would be bound to reject, not as impious, but as seditious. Thus every Religion which could not agree with it would be proscribed; and everyone would be free to have none other than the code itself. Done carefully, this work would, it seems to me, be the most useful book ever composed, and perhaps the only one necessary for men. There, Sir, is a subject for you. I passionately wish that you might want to undertake this work and adorn it with your Poetry in order that, everyone being able to learn it easily, it might from childhood introduce to all hearts these feelings of gentleness and humanity which shine in your writings and which are always lacking among the devout. I beseech you to contemplate this project, which ought to be pleasing at least to your soul.⁴² You have given us in your *Poem on Natural Religion* the Catechism of man: give us now, in what I propose to you, the Catechism of the Citizen.⁴³ This is a matter to contemplate for a long time, and perhaps to reserve for the last of your works, in order to complete with a benefit to the human race the most brilliant career that a man of letters has ever pursued.⁴⁴

I cannot refrain, Sir, from noting in this connection a quite singular opposition between you and me over the subject of this letter. Surfeited with glory, and undeceived by vain grandeur, you live free in the bosom of abundance; quite sure of immortality, you philosophize peacefully on the nature of the soul; and if the body or the heart suffers, you have Tronchin for a doctor and for a friend: however, you find only evil on the Earth. And I, obscure, poor, and tormented by an incurable malady, I meditate with pleasure in my retreat, and find that all is good.⁴⁵ From whence might these apparent contradictions come? You yourself have explained it: you enjoy, but I hope, and hope adorns everything.⁴⁶

I have as much difficulty in leaving this tiresome letter as you will have in finishing it. Pardon me, great man, for a zeal which is perhaps indiscreet, but which would not be vented on you, if I esteemed you less. God forbid that I would want to offend the one of my contemporaries whose talents I honor the most, and whose writings speak the best to my heart; but it concerns the cause of Providence, from which I expect all things.

After having so long drawn consolations and courage from your lessons, it is hard for me that now you remove all that from me, in order only to offer me an uncertain and vague hope, rather as a present palliative than as a compensation to come. No: I have suffered too much in this life not to expect another one. All the subtleties of Metaphysics will not make me doubt for a moment the immortality of the soul, and a beneficent Providence. I feel it, I believe it, I wish it, I hope it, I shall defend it until my last breath; and it will be, of all the controversies that I shall have sustained, the only one where my interest will not be forgotten.

I am, Sir, etc.⁴⁷

Letter from Voltaire to Rousseau



Les Délices,
September 12, 1756

My dear philosopher, we are able you and I, in the intervals of our ills, to reason in verse and in prose. But at the present moment, you will pardon me for leaving there all these philosophical discussions which are only amusements. Your letter is very beautiful, but I have with me one of my nieces who for three weeks has been in rather great danger; I am her sick-nurse and very sick myself. I shall wait to get better before daring to think with you.¹ Monsieur Tronchin has told me that you will finally come into your fatherland. Monsieur d'Alembert will tell you what a philosophical life one leads in my little refuge. It would deserve the name it bears, if it could possess you sometimes. It is said that you hate to stay in cities; I have that in common with you; I would like to resemble you in so many things, that this conformity could determine you to come to see us. My condition does not permit me to say more to you about it. Be assured that of all those who have read you, no one esteems you more than myself, despite my bad jokes, and that of all those who will see you, no one is disposed more to love you tenderly.

I begin by suppressing all ceremony.

EDITORS' NOTES,
Letter from Voltaire to Rousseau, August 30, 1755

Numerous versions of this letter exist. We have used the one actually received by Rousseau written in the handwriting of one of Voltaire's secretaries with corrections by Voltaire. This version can be found in R. A. Leigh's edition of the *Correspondance complète de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Lettre 317, IV, 158-162) along with variants from the other versions and very useful notes. More useful information can be found in *Selected Letters of Voltaire*, annotated and translated by Theodore Besterman (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1963), 148-159. Because of the extreme eccentricity of Voltaire's capitalization, in this respect we have followed the version published by Launay in his edition of Rousseau's *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. 2, 268-269, which is the version copied by Rousseau. During the lifetime of Rousseau and Voltaire it was published without permission in the *Mercure de France*, October 1755, then by Voltaire at the head of his *L'Orphelin de la Chine*, in a corrected version given by Rousseau in the *Mercure*, November 1755, and in an edition of *Oeuvres de Voltaire* (Geneva, 1775).

1. This letter shows a very cursory glance at the *Second Discourse*. For a more thorough version of Voltaire's reaction, see G. R. Havens, *Voltaire's Marginalia on Rousseau* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971).

2. This date is accepted as plausible although it appears only in the versions printed by the *Mercure*.

3. Voltaire had recently moved to les Délices, near Geneva when Rousseau sent him a copy of the *Second Discourse*. Voltaire's proximity to Geneva contributed to Rousseau's decision not to return to his homeland at this time. Rousseau says that he feared that Voltaire's presence would "cause a revolution" in Geneva by introducing Parisian morals there. He says that he hinted at this in his response to Voltaire's letter. See *Confessions*, VIII (Pléiade, I, 396-397).

4. The word "*bêtes*," translated as "stupid" also means beasts or animals. The contrast with intelligence and the following sentence indicate that Voltaire is playing on both meanings. Voltaire's *esprit* is rendered as "intelligence," but it could also be read as "wit." In reading this passage, the contrast with Rousseau's discussion of the stupidity and limited "qualities of mind" (*qualités d'esprit*) of natural humans should not be forgotten. Voltaire is referring to the animal-like existence of humans in the pure state of nature described in the First Part of the *Second Discourse*.

5. Torquato Tasso (1544-1595) is the author of *Jerusalem Delivered* which was partially translated by Rousseau. His life was the theme of the first version of the first act of Rousseau's opera, *Les Muses galantes*. Rousseau was advised that this act would not please the court (conceivably because of its anti-aristocratic theme) and substituted one based on Hesiod. See *Confessions*, VII (Pléiade, I, 334).

6. The version edited by Launay reads "your."

7. The first volume of the *Encyclopedia* edited by Diderot and d'Alembert was published in 1751. Rousseau contributed articles on music.

8. The Jansenists were the leading religious opponents of the Jesuits in France. Their opposition is shown most famously in Pascal's *Provincial Letters*.

9. *Oedipus*, Voltaire's first play, was first performed in 1718, not long after his release from the Bastille. In spite of the opposition about which Voltaire speaks here, it was a popular and financial success.

10. This is the Abbé Pierre François Guyot Desfontaines (1685–1745), who had been charged with homosexuality and imprisoned in an insane asylum. He had been released as a result of Voltaire's influence.

11. This work is the *Abridgement of Universal History from Charlemagne to Charles V*, by Mr. de Voltaire. It had been printed by the bookseller Néaulme to whom it had been sold by Laurent Angliviel de La Beaumelle.

12. Jean Chapelain (1595–1674) wrote *The Maid, or France Set Free*.

13. Voltaire refers to *La Pucelle* or *The Maid*, which had, in fact, been completed a little under twenty years earlier. His indirect reference to this treatment of Joan of Arc is a sign of his unwillingness to acknowledge this work publicly.

14. Voltaire refers to the *Precis of the Age of Louis XIV*. He had been made royal historiographer in 1745 and served until 1750. The bookseller referred to here is named Le Prieur.

15. Augustus was originally named Gaius Octavius. Voltaire refers to the major poets and political figures alive during the fall of the Roman Republic and the beginning of the empire.

16. The poet Clément Marot (1495–1544) wrote, among other major works, an important translation of the Psalms. The Saint Bartholemew's Day Massacre of Protestants took place on August 24, 1572.

17. *Le Cid* was written by Corneille and was first performed in 1636. The Fronde lasted from 1648 to 1652.

18. Tahmasp-Kouli-Khan (1688–1747) was shah of Persia from 1736 under the name of Nadir.

19. Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) wrote *On the Quest for Truth*.

20. Marc Chappuis (1714–1779) was a Genevan friend of Rousseau. He is mentioned in Book VIII of the *Confessions* (Pléiade, I, 394).

EDITORS' NOTES,

Letter from Rousseau to Voltaire, September 10, 1755

For the text of this letter, we have used Pléiade, III, 226–229. On the circumstances of its composition, see Maurice Cranston, *The Noble Savage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 9–10.

1. For the irony of this remark, compare *First Discourse* (*Collected Writings*, II, 15).

2. The word (*bêtise*) refers to Voltaire's double-entendre; see editorial note 4 to the preceding *Letter from Voltaire to Rousseau* and compare the last line of this letter.

3. A reference to Voltaire's "Memnon on Human Wisdom" (1749).

4. Montaigne, "On Pedantry," *Essays*, I, 25 (Frame, 104).

5. The reference is to the title character of Molière's play, *George Dandin*.

6. In Dufour's edition of the *Correspondance générale* the following note to the passage is attributed to Rousseau: "The lotus and the moly are made famous by Homer in the *Odyssey*. The first provided a food worthy of the gods and seemed so delicious to the compagnons of Ulysses that he had to use violence to get them to come back on board their ships. Mercury gave the second to Ulysses as the means to preserve him from the enchantments of Circe the magician." See *Pléiade*, III, 1382.

EDITORS' NOTES,
Letter from J. J. Rousseau to Mr. de Voltaire,
August 18, 1756

Translation by Terence E. Marshall. For the text, see *Pléiade*, IV, 1059–1075.

1. This letter was written in response to Voltaire's poem on the Lisbon earthquake (*Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne, ou examen de cet axiome: "tout est bien"*), which had been sent to Rousseau by Charles Duclos along with Voltaire's "Poem on Natural Law" (probably on Voltaire's own suggestion). The Lisbon earthquake occurred on November 1, 1755, and estimates of the number of those killed vary from 20,000 to 60,000 persons. Voltaire composed the poem before year's end and circulated it anonymously, attempting at first to attribute authorship to someone name R. P. Lièbaut. The poem was published in Geneva in March 1756, and sent to Rousseau in July. For the circumstances of the composition of Rousseau's letter in reply to Voltaire, see Cranston, *The Noble Savage*, 29–31. This letter was first published, without Rousseau's knowledge and against his wishes, by the Cramer brothers in Geneva in 1760 (*Ibid.*, 220–221). Rousseau discusses his letter and its eventual publication in *Confessions*, IX and X (*Pléiade*, I, 429–430 and 539–542). When Voltaire received Rousseau's letter, he promised a reply, but one was never sent. See editorial note 43 and Voltaire's letter of September 12, 1756 (above, 122).

2. Two words and their derivatives that recur in the text—*tout* and *mal*—pose problems for translation. In some instances, *tout* is translated as "all," in others as "everything," and in others as "the whole" (*le tout*). *Mal* is sometimes translated as "bad," other times as "evil," and other times as "ill" or "trouble."

3. See Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, Epistle I, 294, and Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, *Theodicy*, I.7 and 89. Widely debated in the eighteenth century, the question of "optimism" and "pessimism" relates to the Enlightenment's project to conquer or "master" nature according to human will, as opposed to the traditional view subordinating human will or desire to natural limits. In a novel way, Rousseau discusses the natural as providing criteria of good and bad, first in the *Second Discourse*, prompting Voltaire's correspondence, and later in the *Emile*, which can be read in part as a response to Voltaire's ridicule of optimism in *Candide*. In addition to the Biblical tradition, for examples of the classical view of providence, see Plato, *Timaeus*, 30^b5 ff; *Laws* 899^d ff, 903^b9–10; Proclus, *Ten Problems Concerning Providence*.

4. The original edition of Voltaire's poem ended with these verses:

*Que faut-il ô mortels? Mortels, il faut souffrir
Se soumettre en silence, adorer et mourir.*

[What is necessary, o mortals? Mortals, it is necessary to suffer,
To submit in silence, adore, and die.]

5. See the beginning of Voltaire's *Letter to Rousseau* of August 30, 1755, referring to the *Second Discourse* as Rousseau's "new book against the human race" (102). In his Preface to the poem on the *Disaster of Lisbon*, Voltaire says "undoubtedly everything (*tout*) is arranged, everything (*tout*) is ordered by Providence; but it is only too obvious (*sensible*) that everything (*tout*) for a long time has not been arranged for our present well-being."

6. Compare Cicero, *De Senectute*, § XIX and § XX, where Cato the Elder speaks of old age and death. See Rousseau's later quotation from this work (below, editorial note 28).

7. See Voltaire's *Zadig or Destiny*, XX, "The Hermit." Ironically the conclusion of Voltaire's tale seems to maintain the very position on Providence that he repudiates in his poem on Lisbon and that Rousseau supports in his reply.

8. See Erasmus, *Colloquies*, "The Godly Feast" (Trans. C. R. Thompson; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1957), 160. Throughout his letter, Rousseau's citations from Cicero's *De Senectute* seem to be drawn from the *Colloquies*.

9. Ibid., 156–157. Theophilus is speaking. Uranius, speaking afterward, disagrees. See Plato, *Republic*, XI, 619c–e, 621a–b. Voltaire's text does not mention Erasmus, and Rousseau first added this reference for his 1764 edition of his letter.

10. Voltaire was then living in Vevey, outside Geneva.

11. "I do not regret having lived, since I have lived in such a fashion that I do not think I was born in vain." The quote is found in Erasmus, *Colloquies*, 156. See Cicero, *De Senectute*, XXIII, 84. The syntax of Cicero's text is revised to change the grammar from a subordinate clause to an independent sentence. The original reads: "*Neque me vixisse paenitet, quoniam ita vixi ut non frustra me natum existimem.*"

12. See *Poem on the Disaster of Lisbon*, Voltaire's footnote to line 75. Cf. Pope, *Essay on Man*, I, 243–258 and III, 7–26. The reference in the sequel is to Jean-Pierre de Crousaz (1663–1750), who published two works against Pope: *Examen de l'essai de M. Pope sur l'homme* (Lausanne: Marc-Michel Bousquet, 1737) and *Commentaire sur la traduction en vers, de M. l'Abbé du Resnel, de l'Essai de M. Pope sur l'homme* (Geneva: Pelliser, 1738). Voltaire refers to him in his poem as a "wise geometer." Rousseau, in an earlier draft, says of him: "A mediocre geometer, poor reasoner, obdurate and pedantic mind, obscure and cowardly writer, this man acquired, I know not how, some reputation that he would soon have lost if one had a mind to read him." For other references to de Crousaz, see the criticism by Julie in Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, II, Letter 18, as well as the less unfavorable mention in *Émile*, II (Pléiade, IV, 371).

13. See *Poem on the Disaster of Lisbon*, Voltaire's lengthy footnote to line 75.

14. Ibid.

15. Pascal, *Pensées*, 176. Voltaire, "Dialogue entre un Brahmane et un Jésuite sur la nécessité et l'enchaînement des choses." Compare also *Zadig*, XX, "The Hermit," in *The Portable Voltaire* (New York: Viking, 1949), 405.

16. This seems to be an ironic reference to Voltaire's own skeptical comments at lines 161–206 of his poem. Compare this with his footnote to line 75. See Voltaire's later essay, *Le Philosophe ignorant* (1766), in *Mélanges* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1961), 859 ff.

17. See the footnote to line 75 of Voltaire's poem. On the question of the void, see Aristotle, *Physics*, IV, 213^a30–216^a22; Descartes, *The Principles of Philosophy*, II, Principles xvi–xviii; Voltaire, *Philosophical Letters*, 14 and 15 ("On Descartes and Newton" and "On the System of Attraction").

18. Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), author of the widely read *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697), the *Letter on the Comet*, *Miscellaneous Thoughts on the Comet*, and *Responses to Questions from a Provincial*, was interpreted as attempting to prove that an atheistic society is possible. Leibniz, whose optimistic cosmology Rousseau broadly endorses, presented this argument in *The Theodicy* to counter Bayle's skepticism. Rousseau similarly opposes Bayle's position on the purely secular society in "The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar," *Émile*, IV (Bloom, 266–313). Nevertheless, even while championing optimism, Rousseau paradoxically seems to share with Voltaire something of Bayle's skepticism. See Rousseau's *Letter to Philopolis* (129 below), where Rousseau qualifies the relationship between his own views and those of Pope and Leibniz. Compare Leibniz, *Theodicy*, I, 7 and 8, and *Causa Dei*; see also William H. Barber, *Leibniz in France: From Arnaud to Voltaire, a Study in French Reactions to Leibnizianism, 1670–1760* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955).

19. *Poem on the Disaster of Lisbon*, Voltaire's footnote to line 75. Compare Pope, *An Essay on Man*, Epistle I, 30–35 and 235–294. For a similar allusion in ancient thought, see Homer, *Iliad*, VIII, 18 and Plato, *Theaetetus*, 153d.

20. Voltaire's note to his Preface to the *Poem on the Disaster of Lisbon*.

21. Ibid. The examples are given by Voltaire at lines 97–100.

22. Codrus, the last king of Athens, saved Attica from the Dorian invasion. The Dorians had been told by the oracle that they would conquer provided that they did not kill the Athenian King. Codrus, disguised as a peasant, entered the Dorian camp and provoked one of the soldiers to kill him.

Manlius Curtius was a legendary hero of Rome. According to the story, in 362 B.C. a great chasm appeared in the Roman Forum and the oracles declared it could only be filled by throwing into it what accounted for the city's strength. Declaring the strength of the city lay in a virtuous citizen, Curtius mounted his horse in full armor and leaped into the depths, whereupon the earth closed again.

The Roman consul Decius and his son, in separate incidents, sacrificed their lives in battle to assure Roman victories.

The Philaeni were two Carthaginian brothers who, in the course of boundary negotiations between their country and Cyrene, accepted the Cyrenian condition of agreeing to the frontier the brothers had established: namely that they be buried alive at the spot they had marked. The Carthaginians erected altars to their memory where they had died.

23. Voltaire's *Poem on the Disaster of Lisbon* is subtitled *On Examination of this Axiom: Everything Is Good*. Rousseau's exact wording is: "... au lieu de *Tout est bien*, il vaudrait peut-être mieux dire: *Le tout est bien*, ou *Tout est bien pour le tout*.

24. Alluding to Voltaire's Lockean theory that ideas must derive from sense perception, Rousseau makes use of this otherwise skeptical thesis for refuting Voltaire's "pessimistic" view of the whole. At the same time, Rousseau avails himself of Voltaire's published affirmations of theism as a means for deducing support for "optimism." Compare *Émile*, IV, "The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar," where the Vicar derives God's providence from the idea of God, which in turn derives from the idea of the soul. Contrast Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, IV, with Plato, *Symposium*, 204^{b2}–212^{a7} and *Timaeus* 37^{a4} ff as well as Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1, VI, IX–X, and *Metaphysics*, Lambda, 1072^{b3}–4. Concerning the difference between ancient and modern philosophy on this question, Rousseau sides with the moderns while attempting to vindicate Providence by harmonizing science and religion. On Leibniz's effort to synthesize the metaphysics of the ancients and the moderns, see Jacob Klein, *Leibniz: An Introduction in Lectures and Essays* (Annapolis, MD: St John's College Press, 1985), 197–217. See Joseph Cropsey, "The Whole as Setting for Man: On Plato's *Timaeus*," *Interpretation*, Vol. 2 (1971), 21–63.

25. Seneca, *De Providentia*, VI, 1.

26. Voltaire, *Zadig*, XX, "The Hermit."

27. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Lambda, 7.1072^{b20} and 9.1074^{b25}–30. Plato, *Laws*, X, 885b, 888c sq, and XII, 948c. Compare Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, boxvi to consider Rousseau's hint of unorthodoxy here.

28. Cicero, *De Senectute*, XXIII, 84. "Nature has willed that we be on earth as guests in passage, not as inhabitants." Cato the Elder is speaking. This is quoted in Erasmus, *Colloquies*, "The Godly Feast," 156.

29. On the feeling or sentiment of existence, see *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, V, as well as *Letters à Malesherbes* (Pléiade, I, 1137–1147).

30. Compare Hobbes's idea of felicity in *Leviathan*, I, xi, and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 1177^{a12} sq. See also Rousseau's *Emile*, IV (Pléiade, IV, 602 in relation to pp. 305–306, 340–341) and *Rêveries*, V.

31. Compare *Emile*, IV (Pléiade, IV, 592).

32. In one manuscript of the letter (MS. 2 at the Bibliothèque de Neuchâtel), Rousseau copied this gloss of Formey: "Mr. Rousseau is quite fortunate if he finds in the works of our free-thinking philosophers a complete confession of faith which puts his conscience under cover from all disquietude. But it is necessary to admit that these preceptors of the human race are ignorance itself in the case of religion." For Rousseau's remarks on the philosophers' esotericism in this regard, see *Observations* (*Collected Writings*, II, 45–46n).

33. In the manuscript cited in editorial note 32, the following words are crossed out: "as infinity, eternity, substance, matter, mind, necessity, contingency, and other words the like of which can never signify anything for us." See *Emile*, IV (Pléiade, IV, 552–553, 577).

34. See Diderot, *Pensées philosophiques*, XXI, and compare Rousseau's *Letter to*

Vernes, February 18, 1758 (*Correspondance générale*, III, 287); *Emile* IV (Pléiade, IV, 579), and Letter to Franquières (Pléiade, IV, 1139).

35. On materialism, see *Emile*, IV (Pléiade, IV, 574–586); for Rousseau's distinction between persuasion and conviction, see Christopher Kelly, "To Persuade without Convincing: The Language of Rousseau's Legislator," *American Journal of Political Science*, 31 (May 1987): 321–335.

36. If motion is not essential to matter, then one might not have an infinite number of throws (consider the Cartesian concept of inertia within the context of Newtonian dynamics). This might point to the necessity of a doctrine of creation to explain motion, as in the case of the "Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar," although the vicar is ambivalent over the doctrine of Creation and denies he is a philosopher. (See *Emile*, IV [Pléiade, IV, 565, 576, 593].) If, on the other hand, motion is essential to matter, it is possible to speak of an infinity of throws, contrary to the teaching on creation but consistent with the view of order emerging from chaos. This is the position that Rousseau seems to take, similar to that of Diderot but different from that of the vicar.

37. This bracketed paragraph is not found in the extant manuscripts of Rousseau's letter but was published for the first time in 1861 in Streckeisen-Moltou's edition, *Oeuvres et correspondance inédites de J.-J. Rousseau*.

38. In his poem, Voltaire had of course argued against optimism. In the light of what follows, and because Voltaire is a leading *philosophe*, Rousseau seems to be speaking with thinly disguised irony. See editorial note 32 above. The mind of Voltaire the materialist is the author of the *Henriade*, to which Rousseau refers above.

39. See *Emile*, IV (Pléiade, IV, 632 ff, footnote).

40. See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, II, xxxi; *De Cive*, XV. See also *Social Contract*, IV, 8 and Plato, *Laws*, X, 889c and 909e as well as 886c.

41. See *Social Contract*, IV, 8. Also compare Hobbes, *Leviathan*, II, xxii ("Of Systems—Private Bodies Regular, but Unlawful").

42. The conclusion of this sentence corresponds to the published version of 1764, as based on the first draft of Manuscript 2 (cited in editorial note 32). In the manuscript, Rousseau replaced the last words of the sentence by: "which ought to please the author of Alzire." The version published in 1764 not only conforms with the original text but also alludes ironically to the skeptical view of the soul in Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique*, also published in 1764.

43. As previously noted, Voltaire did not respond directly to Rousseau's suggestion. However, five years later, in 1761, Voltaire published *Candide*, in which he ridiculed optimism, and which Rousseau interpreted to be his reply. In 1762, Rousseau published *Emile* and *Social Contract*. In the first of these, he defends the idea of the goodness of nature and provides, in "The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar," a statement of natural religion that is seemingly Rousseau's own "Catechism of Man." In the *Social Contract*, IV, 8, he provides a basis for the "Catechism of the Citizen." By asserting that such a work would be "the most useful book ever composed, and perhaps the only one necessary for men," Rousseau indicates his difference from the biblical tradition.

44. Rousseau seems to invite Voltaire to undertake the task of Plato, who concluded his career by writing *The Laws*, a work containing in Book X a teaching on civil and natural religion (which Avicenna called a “book of prophecy”). By contrast, Rousseau, who is himself so often compared to Plato, concluded his career with *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, not with a political work. Rousseau encourages the *mondain* Voltaire to take up the civil task, though he himself will fulfill it in the *Social Contract*. On the *Rêveries* as intended by Rousseau to be his last work, consider his remark concerning this project written on the *Cartes à Jouer* (Pléiade, I, 1165): “thus my book, if I continue it, ought naturally to end when I approach the end of my life.” In this last book, Rousseau explains his happiness and thus his particular grounds for “optimism.”

45. Voltaire was then living in retirement at Les Délices, overlooking Geneva and its lake, with a spectacular view of the Alps beyond. Dr. Theodore Tronchin (1709–1781), one of the well-known physicians of the time, was Voltaire’s doctor. By this time, Rousseau himself had contracted the painful and incurable blockage of the urinary tract that was to afflict him for the remainder of his life. Not long after writing this letter, he was told by doctors that he could only expect to live a few months longer. Accordingly, though Rousseau was by eighteen years Voltaire’s junior, he gives his reader the impression that as a consequence of this illness, he might discuss the question of death and providence in a manner reminiscent of the Elder Cato speaking to the young in Cicero’s *De Senectute*. It is notable that Rousseau’s literary references are to the Roman stoics rather than to the Bible.

46. See the end of the final version of Voltaire’s *Poem on the Disaster of Lisbon*:

Un calife autrefois, á son heure dernière,
Au Dieu qu’il adorait dit pour toute prière:
“Je t’apporte, ô seul roi, seul être illimité,
Tout ce que tu n’as pas dans ton immensité,
Les défauts, les regrets, les maux, et l’ignorance.”
Mais il pouvait encore ajouter, *l’espérance*.

[A Caliphe of old, at his last hour,
Said to God, whom he adored, for his only prayer:
“I bring you, o only King, only unlimited Being,
Everything that you do not have in your immensity,
Defects, regrets, evils, and ignorance.”
But he could also have added: *hope*.]

For the original ending of Voltaire’s poem, which is the one Rousseau received, see editorial note 4 above.

47. In Manuscript 2 (see editorial note 32 above), Rousseau closes with “I am with respect, Sir,” Before arriving at this formula, Rousseau had concluded in these terms: “Believe, Sir, that I honor you at the bottom of my soul much more than your servants.” On the other side appears the following: “Nothing is so cold as a letter where one speaks tranquilly and if one does not animate it by a little wit, it is intolerable reading.”

EDITORS' NOTE,
Letter from Voltaire to Rousseau, September 12, 1756

Translation by Terence E. Marshall. Based on the copy written in Rousseau's hand, Manuscript 7885, 109 (Bibliothèque de la Ville de Neuchâtel, Switzerland). See Dufour, ed., *Correspondence générale de J.-J. Rousseau* II, 200.

1. Rousseau notes here that "He has no longer written to me since that time."